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ABSTRACT

The "Longman Bibliography of Composition and Rhetoric" is an annual, annotated, descriptive bibliography of work in rhetoric and composition. Its first volume contains 3,853 citations for titles appearing in 1984 and 1985. The bibliographers received assistance from important authors and editors of publications in rhetoric, who stressed that subject-area bibliographies are an important way of asserting the legitimacy of a profession. The bibliography is a comprehensive, descriptive work encompassing the many disciplines that make up rhetoric and composition. The "Thesaurus of ERIC Descriptors" and convention programs of the National Council of Teachers of English and the Conference on College Composition and Communication helped define the terms and subjects covered in the profession. Next, the bibliographers mapped and clustered the terms, which cover works on written communication in English or other languages, the processes whereby people compose and understand written messages, and methods of teaching people to communicate effectively in writing. To write the entries, 152 teachers and researchers have volunteered their services, and use a handbook to create consistent 25- to 50-word annotations that are descriptive rather than evaluative. They try to use original materials rather than copy from advertisers whenever possible, although most publishers will not provide examination copies. In the bibliography all entries are listed once, numbered, and cross-referenced. Computers are used for alphabetizing and typesetting, and it is projected that computers will be used more and more in future editions. (SKC)

The Development of The Longman Bibliography of Composition and Rhetoric

Erika Lindemann

The Development of
The Longman Bibliography of Composition and Rhetoric
1987 CCCC Meeting, Atlanta, Georgia

Last month, Longman Inc. published the first volume of what will be an annual, annotated, descriptive bibliography of work in our discipline. Volume I of the Longman Bibliography of Composition and Rhetoric contains 3853 citations for titles appearing in 1984 and 1985. Volume II, cataloguing works appearing in 1986, is already underway and should appear by early 1988. In this session, Randy Woodland and I want to tell you what our first year's experience has taught us about bibliographical work in general and about the scholarly interests of our profession in particular. I want to explain how we solved some of the problems we encountered, and Randy, who has been my associate editor in the crucial first year of the project, will give you an overview of what is in the first volume, what kinds of questions writing teachers and researchers seem to be asking as evidenced by the books, articles, dissertations, and conference presentations published in 1984 and 1985.

The Longman Bibliography owes a great debt to other bibliographers. As long ago as 1973, Paul Bryant in an address to CCCC called for bibliographies that would help us understand the continuity of the profession and avoid thinking that every idea for teaching composition is new at the moment. Since then, several people have given us valuable bibliographical resources: Richard Larson, Gary Tate, Winifred Horner, Michael Moran and Ronald Lunsford, the editors of Research in the Teaching of English and The Rhetoric Society Quarterly, and the CCCC Committee compiling a historical bibliography surveying major developments in the field from the turn of the century. All of this bibliographical activity signifies growth in the profession because bibliographies don't become necessary until we find keeping up with each other's work difficult.

Bibliographies also represent one of the ways a profession asserts its identity as a profession. They are ways of saying to ourselves and our colleagues in other disciplines, "Look, we aren't just a special interest group; we do research, and we publish; we have a legitimate body of scholarship."

Valuable as these bibliographies are, they differ from the Longman Bibliography in at least two important ways. First, they are selective. Their authors and editors choose what seem to them to be the most significant works on a subject. Selective bibliographies are helpful because we can depend on the judgments of experts to guide our reading until we feel confident about where we want to go. They also help establish standards for scholarly excellence by granting significance to the works selected for the bibliography but not to others. Second, the bibliographies to date are mostly topical. They address the general interests of the profession, concerns common to a large number of writing teachers and researchers.

The Longman Bibliography, however, represents a different kind of bibliography. It is neither selective nor especially topical. It attempts to be comprehensive, descriptive, and capable of including whatever topics people in the profession happen to be writing about. And because it is a new kind of bibliography, it raises some new bibliographical questions. Although we haven't answered all of them, they have been interesting questions to address, and in this talk, I would like to discuss three issues that have especially held our attention this past year.

When Tren Anderson of Longman and Harvey Weiner approached me about this project in 1981, I was skeptical about it. Although I thought we should try to put together a comprehensive bibliography, I was not at all sure about what to include or exclude. The first question to address was, "How do we define the field called 'composition and rhetoric'?" It encompasses many disciplines; it gets

taught at all levels of schooling; it embraces issues that, on the surface, have little to do with theory or practice, issues like class size, teacher training, and competency tests. Even if we are able to define what the field includes, how do we usefully organize the many kinds of scholarship we publish? Unlike the compilers of MLA's annual bibliography, we can't begin with the medieval period and move forward century by century.

A necessary first step, then, was to devise a way of looking at our field, of discovering some useful way to catalogue the work we publish. I began with the largest catalogue I could find, the Thesaurus of ERIC Descriptors. The Thesaurus is an alphabetical listing of topics used to index documents for the Educational Resources Information Center, a federally funded document retrieval system coordinated by sixteen clearinghouses. I selected terms from this thesaurus and added others to create a list of topics that the bibliography would have to accommodate. I also looked at NCTE and CCCC convention programs to learn how we seem to define ourselves as a profession, insofar as the papers we deliver represent our teaching and research interests. I considered too the forms of discourse we use to communicate with each other. Some of the subjects we write about are more likely to appear in books and articles; others, in dissertations, textbooks, videotapes, or computer programs.

The next step was to discover patterns in these lists of topics. So, I began mapping and clustering terms. That took about a year, during which time I also dreamed up ridiculous articles to see if they would fit the framework, deliberately trying to crunch the categories. Although some categories kept overlapping, I eventually concluded that cross-referencing such entries might be warranted, so long as we weren't cross-referencing everything. What made me far more nervous was reducing the whole framework to a few, well-defined major categories, the six you have on your handout. It is an arrogant act to say, "These

are the six major areas of interest in our profession, and most of what we do falls under one of these categories." But that is what a bibliographer starting from scratch must do. She must be arrogant in defining where scratch is. The handout represents a table of contents for the Longman Bibliography. Some of the subcategories will not be found in Volume I; they are recent additions, especially in Section 2, because I discovered after the first year's work a much greater variety of topics in theoretical and historical research than I had originally projected.

As these categories indicate, the Longman Bibliography includes published works that treat written communication (whether the writing people do is English or some other language), the processes whereby people compose and understand written messages, and methods of teaching people to communicate effectively in writing. It encompasses all levels of education and even includes textbooks and other instructional materials. I do not claim that it is the only way of looking at the profession--it is not--but it is one way. It is a framework developed inductively, by examining the work we publish. It is also subject to revision as our definitions of scholarship in the field change.

In addition to defining the project's scope and arrangement, a second set of concerns had to do with producing the book itself. Who's going to write all the entries? How do we produce such a bibliography with limited resources? The MLA backs its bibliographical operation with considerable money, hiring trained professional bibliographers to compile its annual volumes and, until recently, sustaining the project through membership fees. Our project, however, has to fly on much more limited finances. It is a commercial venture sponsored by a commercial publisher, unable to advance huge sums of up front money. The project has secured some grants, but much more important, it has attracted generous support from volunteers in the profession. The authors of the Longman

Bibliography are people like you and me, 152 teachers and researchers all over the country. Some teach in public schools; some are graduate students; some are retired. They receive for their work nothing more than the thanks of the profession and a copy of the volume they have helped put together. The project flies because they gave their time and expertise to lift it off the ground.

All contributing bibliographers receive an assignment, generally three to six journals or a handful of publishers to work with. They may work individually or together with colleagues. For example, Pat Hartwell, Mike Williamson, Dan Tannacito, and Donald McAndrew of Indiana University of Pennsylvania work as a team to prepare entries for all ERIC documents. Barbara Weaver and Laura Helms at Ball State University prepare most of the entries for college textbooks. Others complete their assignments by themselves, like a large army of ants, each person contributing a valuable piece of the project. Even if they turn up nothing, they have done their jobs well; at least the ground has been covered.

The reliability and usefulness of the Longman Bibliography depends on these contributing bibliographers. They review their assigned materials, prepare brief descriptive annotations for each entry, determine where each entry will appear within one of the six major categories, and decide whether or not to cross-reference it. To guide them in their work, I wrote a 30-page Handbook for Contributing Bibliographers. It is not a substitute for their expertise and judgment, but it serves as a kind of reference guide, describing the project, establishing consistent stylistic conventions, explaining how to write descriptive annotations, and giving advice on assigning entries to categories. To help insure consistent formats, contributing bibliographers prepare most entries on pre-printed forms, which they then send to me.

The most significant difference between this and other bibliographies is that it is a descriptive, not an evaluative, bibliography. Most of the annotations

are brief, up to twenty-five words for most entries and up to fifty words for books. They tell a reader what the material is or what it's about. As a rule, they report the main argument, thesis, or research conclusion. Or, they may describe a work's major organizational divisions. Or, they will indicate the work's purpose or scope. What the annotations do not do, however, is evaluate the material. They do not include words like "major," or "significant," or "flawed," words that express a bibliographer's opinion of a work. Instead, they briefly describe the material, leaving it up to you to determine if it might worth consulting, given your interests as a researcher or teacher.

The practice of using contributing bibliographers to compile each volume is necessary, but it is also fraught with potential problems. Corresponding with over 150 people is no small feat. Some school libraries may not hold the journal I have assigned to a contributing bibliographer, so we must shuffle assignments. Journals come and go--and lately, publishers too--so it's sometimes difficult to keep track of over 250 titles in the master list.

A more serious problem concerns the annotations for books listed in each volume. Although people working on journals, the majority, examine their materials firsthand, folks working with publishers generally do not. Instead, they correspond with marketing or editorial representatives and prepare entries from copy provided by the publisher. Some will argue that this practice calls the reliability of the bibliography into question. How can you know what a book is like unless you hold it in your hands and look through it?

It's a valid question. I would answer it by saying that most publishers are unwilling to provide examination copies of books, computer software, videotapes, and recordings for bibliographers to annotate. If we want to include these materials, we must get the information some other way, at least for now. Second, enlisting the help of publishers works well; it has been the established

practice for assembling the annual WPA bibliographies of college textbooks since 1981. Publishers know that the annotations they provide will be edited if they are not descriptive, so they rarely send copy that is larded with puffery. Finally, examining these materials firsthand is not a serious problem because this is a descriptive, not an evaluative, bibliography. Evaluative bibliographers must make judgments about the usefulness of a title, its contribution to the profession, or the rigor of its argument. Our goal is different. We want our annotations to tell readers--in no more than fifty words--what the work is about. Most publishers share a similar goal, composing advertising copy that describes a title for a potential buyer.

Although each entry in the Longman Bibliography appears in full only once, all entries are numbered, and some are cross-referenced. For example, an article describing how to use a particular computer software program in teaching a freshman composition class will appear in Section 4.52, but you're also likely to find the entry number listed in Section 5.8, especially if the article describes the computer program in some detail. The contributing bibliographers have made some good decisions about when to cross-reference a work, keeping in mind that readers consult bibliographies for many reasons and with differing assumptions about where to begin their search for information The bibliography also includes a separate author index, and some readers may want to begin their search there. If you're already familiar with Toby Fulwiler's work on writing across the curriculum, for example, you might start with the author index to see what he had to say on the subject last year.

A third question--"How do we sustain the project year in and year out?"--doesn't yet have an answer. Ideally, now that the project has been established, it should proceed smoothly from each annual cycle to the next. Readers should expect a consistent system in each volume for locating information, and the

volunteers who compile the volumes should expect consistent procedures for completing their work. At the same time, the project must be flexible enough to correct errors, to accommodate changes in the field, or to respond to new technologies, especially computers, that make bibliographical work faster and more accurate.

The computer has played a significant role in producing this book. I am most grateful to Randy Woodland and the staff of UNC's Computation Center and Printing Department for developing programs to help us process the entries once the contributing bibliographers had submitted them to me. Briefly, the procedure went like this. After I had checked and edited the entries, typists put the information on our mainframe computer, each item of each entry tagged with a special code. These tags told the computer how to format and punctuate the information, given the Chicago Manual of Style's conventions for articles, books, ERIC documents, and so on. A second computer program then alphabetized all of the entries and prepared the author index. Then, after we had added special typesetting codes, the data were transmitted electronically from the mainframe to a compositor, which set the type for the book.

This time around, we have not used computer technology as advantageously as we might have. Getting the book out on time prevented us from cleaning up computer programs. Although it takes time to work the bugs out, once a program runs, it doesn't have to be changed, and it can do in a short time what it takes error-prone human beings much longer to do by hand. Saving time and reducing error are important in bibliographical work. Every time someone types or retypes a page number, for example, the chance of introducing error increases. Every time someone submits entries late, the project can be delayed, especially if you have to wait to alphabetize all entries before you can proceed. Our computer programs allow us to process entries all year long,

whenever they come in. They only have to be typed into the computer once, and they can be stored in the mainframe for years if necessary. The computer enabled us to alphabetize over 3800 entries overnight and to typeset the book in 30 to 40 hours. That means, when things are working right--and they aren't yet--the annual volumes can reach libraries and members of the profession within a year, before the information in them is outdated. Computer technology will also permit contributing bibliographers to prepare the entries on diskettes that can be loaded into the mainframe without retyping the material, another way to avoid introducing errors. Although word processors and mainframes speak different languages, in anther year we hope to finish a manual that lets contributing bibliographers format data on wordprocessors in a way the mainframe can read.

The test of any bibliography is its usefulness. We hope that the Longman Bibliography will be a useful resource, offering the profession a way of learning what has been done--even what has been done badly--so that future research can address intelligently the questions writing teachers and researchers must ask. You can help by letting me know what you find valuable about the first volume and by suggesting improvements for the second. You are also welcome to join the project. If you would like to serve a three-year term as a contributing bibliographer, simply write to me. People like you have made this project possible, and if the bibliography serves its readers well, people like you will help to sustain it.

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